

REVIEWS OF GOVERNMENT REPORTS AND PUBLIC DOCUMENTS

Crisis in Child Mental Health: Challenge for the 1970s. By the JOINT COMMISSION ON MENTAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. Pp. xx+578. \$10.00.

This report constitutes a veritable Magna Charta for the children of the United States. It reflects an impressive collective effort of more than five hundred of the country's key professional persons concerned with service to children. Some of the best minds in psychiatry, pediatrics, child psychology, social service, education, and the ministry have contributed to this major statement on where we stand in reference to our children. Their work also received support from a broad array of voluntary and governmental agencies concerned with problems of children and youth. An alarm is sounded—loud and clear—that says to all concerned with the future of this country that our neglect and mistreatment of our children will leave us a legacy of societal problems most dismal in its implications.

The findings presented in the report are rightfully characterized by Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff in his foreword as “shocking.” Here are some of the facts the Congress of the United States is asked to contemplate as the initiator and sponsor of the study:

One million four hundred thousand children under the age of eighteen needed psychiatric care in 1966. Of these, nearly one million did not receive the care they needed.

Not a single community in the country provides an acceptable standard of services for its mentally ill children, with very serious lacks existing uniformly with respect to early therapeutic intervention.

The officially recorded delinquency and youth crime rates have shown an alarming increase over the past decade.

Each year almost one million of the nation's youth drop out of school and enter the adult world with inadequate skills and with diminished chances of becoming productive citizens.

The perspective of the report includes a strong social component with the recognition that poverty and racism are sources of

major depredations in the lives of American children. It is suggested that the ultimate salvation for many children now being crushed can come only from changes in national priorities so that major infusions of new funds can be forthcoming for improved income maintenance, housing, health care, educational programs and other kinds of social supports. This is in keeping with the strong preventive orientation of the Commission.

A major recommendation of the Commission concerns the need for child advocacy:

We believe that the child deserves an advocate to represent him and his needs to the society in which he lives, an advocate who will insist that programs and services based on sound child development knowledge be available to every child as a public utility.

The Commission spells out a specific plan for creation of centers of child advocacy at the federal, state, and local level. It calls for the establishment of 100 Child Development Councils throughout the nation to promote the development of new services for children and to improve and make more usable those that already exist.

The report emphasizes the need for basic and applied research with major focus upon efforts to evaluate service programs. Manpower problems in delivering services to children receive particular attention.

The section of the volume dealing with the basic recommendations of the Commission carefully spells out the basis for a variety of proposed programmatic undertakings on behalf of children. Subsequent chapters and appendixes provide further documentation of the major findings of the report in such areas as the special mental health risks facing minority children, mental illness among young people in the society at large, and problems retarding the normal growth of infants and children.

This is both a disturbing and an encouraging volume. The enormity of the problems we face in adequately meeting the needs of children is thoroughly documented. We are

obviously failing our children in many basic ways. The report nevertheless gives one hope, since it brings the requirements needed to move the situation forward in a most articulate and integrated manner. There is much agreement cutting across the various professions concerned with children about what has to be done.

The document can serve as a guideline for policy-makers for years to come. Some of its recommendations are already incorporated in the charges to such federal agencies as the Office of Child Development, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the Institute of Child and Human Development. Most of the recommendations, however, remain a gleam in the Commission's eye.

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Public Attitudes toward Social Security, 1935-1965. By MICHAEL E. SCHILTZ. Research Report No. 33, Office of Research and Statistics, Social Security Administration, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970. Pp. xiii+231. \$1.00, paper.

This publication contains an innovative analysis of the attitudes of the general public during 1935-65 toward governmental programs related to old-age insurance and old-age assistance and its extension, national health insurance, and toward welfare recipients. The author has rendered a valuable service with his "survey of surveys." This work presents one of the few longitudinal studies of the attitudes of Americans on a consistent set of topics. Thus, we find that Americans increasingly became suspicious of the legitimacy of welfare recipients. In 1936, 24 percent felt that most welfare recipients

could easily find a job. This proportion rose to 83 percent in 1965 (p. 156). Similarly, the percentage approving government responsibility to pay the medical expenses of the poor decreased from 74 percent in 1936 to 50 percent in 1964 (p. 128).

There are a number of deficiencies in the surveys, some of which gravely weaken the usefulness of the work. Most questions used were asked before 1945, and the latest poll was conducted during 1965; thus some of the interpretations are dated. Also, the questions did not always use the same wording, and trend differences may at times reflect word changes rather than changes in attitudes.

More important, the author compares proportions from surveys based on quota and area samples. The author at times uses intuition to interpret the data when the sampling errors are large but unknown.

The data allowed for the control of the respondent's occupation, age, income, and education, as well as for rural-urban residence and size of place. As a result, the data manipulation is at times quite sophisticated and the interpretations made are both quite plausible and illuminating.

The author indicates that the public has generally been uninformed or has accepted simplistic views of welfare issues. During the period under study, there has been a high level of support of the "means-test" principle. Most Americans have tended to be suspicious of those on relief, but are at the same time willing to extend welfare aid to the "deserving poor."

In spite of its methodological weaknesses, the book is an excellent example of a secondary analysis of longitudinal data concerning how the public viewed welfare and related problems during a three-decade period.

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